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THE EXPOSITORY TIMES.

Notes of Recent Exposition.

THE last lesson that we learn (many men and most women pass away without learning it) is that there is no respect of persons with God.

And yet we ought to be able to learn it. When we read the Bible we might very well say,

This I know
For the Bible tells me so.

Christ spent much of His manhood in illustrating it. And the Apostle Paul gave himself to its inculcation as if there was nothing in the world of half its importance. 'God, I thank thee that I am not as other men are; God, be merciful to me a sinner: I tell you, This man went down to his house justified rather than the other'—that is Christ. 'Where there is neither Jew nor Greek, barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free, but all are one in Christ Jesus'—that is St. Paul.

It was for this that St. Paul withstood St. Peter to the face at Antioch. It was for this that he fought the Judaizers right through his life. It was for this that of the Jews five times he received forty stripes save one. It was for this that at last he was seized in the Temple and handed over to Cæsar to be put to death.

But, if less dramatic, more significant is the illustration of this great fact in the life of our Lord. It is well set forth by Professor Joseph F. McFADYEN, M.A., in his new book, *Jesus and Life* (James Clarke & Co.; 4s. 6d. net). The Old Testament saints were impressed with the insignificance of man in the sight of God. 'What is man that thou art mindful of him?' Jesus was more impressed with the insignificance of man in the sight of man.

He saw that it was bad both for those who despised and for those who were despised. There was an aristocracy and a democracy in His day, and it was none the less harmful a cleavage that it was religious. 'This people that knoweth not the law is cursed.' So the religious aristocracy said, and unfortunately the democracy believed them. Jesus spoke more than one parable against those who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and despised others.

He did not advocate equality. There are those in our day who speak of Him (and not irreverently) as if He were a democrat. But if they mean that He desired to obliterate inequality among men they are wrong. He did say, 'How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom.' And He said, 'Blessed are ye poor.' But He also said that men received talents according to their several ability, and even that in the Kingdom itself they would have their place and their power

according to the use to which their talents had been put.

Certainly He was a democrat, if that means that He was one of the common people. He was one of the common people, and His sympathies were with them. For He had come to seek and to save that which was lost. He called Himself a doctor. The righteous aristocracy were well satisfied with themselves. Why should He attend to them? 'They that are whole,' He said, 'need not the physician, but they that are sick.'

But He was not a democrat if it means that He would have the government in the hands of the multitude because they were the multitude. He was an aristocrat then. He would have the power in the hands of the best. But who are they? Not the self-righteous and not the wealthy. More likely the needy and the sinful. 'If,' says Professor McFadyen, 'Jesus turns His search-light on to the rich, no less in His presence are we compelled to overcome our repugnance to poverty, even to pauperism, and its ugly accompaniments; to pierce beneath the rags and sores and find the man, with a man's longings, a man's feelings to be hurt or respected, a man's soul to be saved. For here too the Gospels teach, not by preaching but by giving insight. Half of our cruelty is ignorance. We judge whole classes of men after we have first shut our eyes: Jesus compels us to look at people, and when we look at them, often we find them transfigured. We speak of the change which passed over Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration. Would it not be nearer the truth to say that the change was in the mind of Peter, James, and John; that for a little while those who had entered most deeply into His spirit saw Him as He was and as He always was?'

One of the ways in which we show that we have not learned that God is no respecter of persons is in our dislike and distrust of foreigners. And yet here the illustration from the life of Jesus is of the most surpassing beauty. When He visited the village in which He had been brought up they expected a special favour. He told them that at the time of the famine in the days of Elijah it was a heathen widow that was relieved, and of all the lepers in the days of Elisha none was cleansed saving Naaman a Syrian. And these are lessons for us. But the great lesson is the way He went with the woman of Canaan.

She came and prayed Him, 'My daughter is grievously vexed with a devil.' But He answered her never a word. How many are the reasons we discover. And they are all good and beautiful. But this is the reason of reasons. One can imagine the surprise of St. Paul the first time that he heard the story. There was first the repulse and then the reception. It was a parable for his own life. The repulse—he had been ready enough for that. Now would he give himself to make the reception better than the repulse had been. 'Where there is neither Jew nor Greek, barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free, but all are one in Christ Jesus.'

Many are the reasons which are given for the absence of the working man from Church. The Poet-Laureate has a reason also. He states it in an address which he delivered to the Tredegar and District Co-operative Society on *The Necessity of Poetry* (Clarendon Press; 2s. net).

The necessity of poetry—to whom is it a necessity? To the working man. Mr. Bridges quotes the often-quoted saying of Darwin: 'Up to the age of thirty or beyond it, Poetry of many kinds, such as the works of Milton, Gray, Byron, Wordsworth, and Shelley gave me great pleasure, and even as a schoolboy I took intense delight in Shakespeare. . . . But now for many years I cannot endure to read a line of Poetry. I have tried lately to read Shakespeare, and found it so intolerably dull that it nauseated me. . . . My mind seems to have become a kind of machine for grinding general laws out of a large collection of facts.'

Darwin regretted this. He said that if he had to live his life again, he would try to keep the poetic side of his mind alive. And Darwin was a working man. He had more education than most of the members of the Tredegar and District Co-operative Society, and more ability. But in respect of poetry he was as any ordinary working man. And he felt that somehow poetry was a necessity.

The necessity of poetry—to what? To the enjoyment of life. For life cannot be fully enjoyed without some recognition of art, and poetry is the most accessible of all the arts. It was this, no doubt, or chiefly this, that the Poet-Laureate came to say to the Co-operative Society, and he said it.

But he said more than this. He said that poetry is a necessity to morals. It is some time since Shakespeare warned us that the man that has no music in himself is fit for treasons, stratagems, and spoils. The Poet-Laureate has the same opinion of the man that has no poetry.

And it is very surprising that he proves it by recalling the fact that poetry is an art. For we have been told very often that art has nothing to do with morality. Art for Art's sake—that is the watchword; and it is equally at home with the evil and with the good. But Mr. BRIDGES challenges the watchword. Art for Art's sake—only if art is expression and nothing else. If it is merely expression, then you may by art express a pigsty as truly as a sunbeam. But art is more than expression. It is the expression of beauty. And if any one is indifferent to that art which is called poetry he is indifferent to the distinction between beauty and ugliness, which in the moral life is the distinction between good and evil.

Is that all? No. Poetry is necessary to Religion.

Mr. George Santayana says that Poetry *is* Religion, and there is no Religion that is not simply poetry. It is the imagination playing poetically upon the facts of life, and, after making its own gods, falling down and worshipping them. The Poet-Laureate does not go so far as that, though he says two challengeable things about poetry and religion.

He says that ever since the Reformation poetry has stood in the way of religion. At the time of the Reformation the beauty of the Roman Catholic worship was lost because it had become the handmaid of moral iniquity. Instead of it the Reformers fell back on the Old Testament.

Now the religion of the Old Testament is, in the opinion of Mr. BRIDGES, no religion to be held by anybody, since Christ came. How were the Reformers content with it? They read it poetically, and so the crudities of it did not occur to them. Much of the Old Testament *is* poetry, and very good poetry. But its religion is very bad religion. He quotes just one text to prove his point—'God sware in his wrath that they should not enter into his rest.' The Reformers enjoyed the poetry and swallowed the religion with it. Thus poetry, the poetry of the Old Testament, has stood in the way of true religion.

And religion has stood in the way of poetry. That is the other thing that the Poet-Laureate says. For religion, which is 'the conviction and habit of a personal communion between the soul and God,' finds its best expression in poetry. And when the religion cannot be accepted, the poetry that ought to express it cannot be enjoyed. Working-men might be glad to go to the Old Testament for its poetry if they could go for that alone. But when they have to take the religion with it, they prefer to let both go. Poetry of some kind they must have, for poetry is art, and art is beauty, and no life can be wholly indifferent to the love of the beautiful. So they leave the Bible alone and turn their attention to the modern poets.

That is the reason why working men do not go

to Church. Give them the poetry of the Old Testament and the religion of the New and they will go.

The Book of Psalms is both the delight and the difficulty of the Old Testament. Under the title of *The Psalms Explained*, Professor William SANDAY and the Rev. C. W. EMMET have published a Companion to the Prayer-Book Psalter (Oxford University Press; 1s. net). Their delight in the work is unmistakable. It is expressed without reserve when they reach the 103rd Psalm.

'A truly evangelical psalm,' they say, 'of consummate beauty. We only need to fill it out with the further revelation of the Life and Death of Christ to bring it up to the full level of Christianity. It is the Old Testament premiss for the New Testament conclusion: "God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son." If we feel the love of God as this psalmist felt it, we shall have the key to everything else in the world.'

But Professor SANDAY and Mr. EMMET are not less impressed with the difficulty of the Book of Psalms. The difficulty lies in its vindictiveness. It is scarcely perceptible to the Church in Scotland. In that Church the Psalms have been till lately the sole material of praise. But it has always been the custom to 'wale a portion wi' judicious care.' In the Church of England the difficulty has been felt all along, and recently by very many and very acutely. A series of 'Tracts on Common Prayer' has been undertaken by the Oxford University Press, in the second of which the whole difficulty has been dealt with in three separate contributions. Mr. EMMET offers 'A Plea for a Revised Use of the Psalter in Public Worship'; Dr. C. F. BURNEY contributes a paper on 'The Imprecatory Psalms'; and Dr. SANDAY discusses 'The Language of Vindictiveness in the Prayer Book, in the Bible, and in Modern Life.' The title of the 'tract' is *The Use of the Psalter* (1s. 6d. net).

The Two Houses of the Convocation of Canterbury recently agreed to a series of Resolutions regarding the use of the Psalter, of which the second is the most important. The second Resolution is: 'That in the use of the Psalter in public worship the following psalm and portions of psalms be omitted: Psalm 58; Psalms 14. 5–7; 55. 16, 24, 25; 68. 21–23; 69. 23–29; 109. 5–19; 137. 7–9; 139. 19–22; 140. 9, 10; 143. 12.'

That Resolution tells us where the difficulty lies. There is one complete psalm, and there are portions of other nine psalms which it is recommended should no longer be read or sung in public. They should be omitted from the Prayer-Book Version of the Psalter, though they may still be read in the Bible. The reason of the desire for their omission is their vindictiveness.

Now this is the first time that a great principle of interpretation has received public recognition. Professor SANDAY recognizes the importance of the occasion. What is the principle? It is that there are 'degrees of sacredness, that there is (as it were) a Bible within the Bible, that everything that is found in its pages is not necessarily Christian, but that certain things were definitely said "to them of old time" and are as definitely not said to us now.'

Professor SANDAY accepts that principle. He accepted it long ago. He now rejoices that it has been acknowledged by the Houses of Convocation. For he believes that 'no further progress will be made until it is not only acknowledged in a half-hearted way but until it sinks into the consciousness of Christians generally that this distinction rests upon the authority of none other than our Lord Jesus Christ Himself. There must be a removing of things that are shaken in order that those things which are not shaken may remain.'

'Certain things were definitely said "to them of old time" and are as definitely not said to us now.' In the Book of Psalms these 'things' are words of vindictiveness. Dr. SANDAY accordingly asks two

questions: (1) How far were the psalmists justified in using the 'language of vindictiveness' to the extent they did? and (2) How far should we be justified in using the same language?

How far were the psalmists justified? Three things have to be understood. In the Old Testament period, and especially in its earlier portion, the lesson which God's people had to be taught was above all else, to love the good and hate the evil. 'The feeling of righteous indignation against sin was one to be fostered and deepened, and not discouraged.' That is the first thing.

The next is, that the distinction between the sinner and the sin was not yet realized. That distinction was reserved for a later age. Remembering this it is easier for us to understand the strength of the psalmists' language. Even now, says Dr. SANDAY, 'even in these days it does not do to be too squeamish. It is more important that the child should grasp strongly the difference between good and evil than that it should express it temperately. For some exuberance of language in the condemnation of sin every allowance should be made.'

The third thing is that all depends upon the motive. Whereupon we see that we must discriminate. For there is a graduated scale of motives. The worst are those in which personal animus is predominant. That is why the long passage in Ps 109 (verses 5 to 19) is 'one that cannot be got over.' For Professor SANDAY is compelled to 'dismiss as special pleading the view that would put these verses into the mouth of the wicked and not of the psalmist himself.'

And yet we must not judge hastily. There is no psalm in which the personal motive is more unmistakable than in Psalm 55. Yet Psalm 55 is a very pathetic and beautiful psalm. 'The writer expresses the wish that he had wings that could carry him far away from the scene of his troubles, and he also draws that moving picture of his former friendship for the man who was now as it would seem his bitterest enemy. It is a delicate touch that in this psalm where the plural alternates with the singular and the writer speaks at one moment of the banded company of his persecutors and at another specially of their leader, where he invokes the punishment of God upon them he does this always in the plural number so that the false friend drops out of sight.'

Professor SANDAY contrasts Psalm 58. This is the psalm of which Convocation has recommended the entire omission. It is not 'what we should call an attractive psalm.' But even here judgment must be with measure. Turn to the end. The verse immediately before the last 'is doubtless one of those which led to its omission. "The righteous shall rejoice when he seeth the vengeance: he shall wash his footsteps in the blood of the ungodly." Our first impulse is to say, What could be more unchristian? This is vindictiveness indeed. And the first line of the next verse seems at first sight to bear out the conclusion. But the last line suddenly flames out and throws a new light upon the whole. "So that a man shall say, Verily there is a reward for the righteous; verily there is a God that judgeth in the earth."'

'After all,' says Dr. SANDAY, 'it is not the jealous personal looking for vengeance and reward, but another and far nobler thing. It is the old story. The prosperity of the wicked seemed to cast a cloud over the Justice of God, and therefore over His whole character and relation to the world of men. But at one stroke that cloud is removed, and God stands revealed once more as the Righteous Judge. If the psalmist rejoices because the righteous will be rewarded, it is not so much because he himself is righteous and will share in the reward, as because it will be seen that God does not neglect His own. We can see the smaller and lower motive passing into the larger and higher.'

The second question is, How far are *we* justified in using vindictive language?

It is still a question of the use of the Psalter. If you ask, How far are we justified in using vindictive language on our own account, as against the Germans for example, Dr. SANDAY makes it very plain that he, for one, would not hesitate to say we are not justified at all. No believer in Christ could possibly say otherwise. But he is concerned at present with the Psalter and its use in public worship. How far is it right for us (remembering that 'certain things were definitely said "to them of old time" and are as definitely not said to us now') to use the vindictive language of the psalmists in our approach to God in worship?

Professor SANDAY'S answer is unmistakable. He holds that we have no right to sing or say any of the passages of which Convocation has recommended the omission, with the possible exception of two.

One is the psalm of which he has just been speaking, the 58th. 'Down to the very end it is what may be described as a drab-coloured psalm; until we come to the last line there is nothing specially edifying or inspiring about it. And when we come to the last verse but one we seem to be thrown back into that vengeful spirit which detracts more than anything else from the high level of the Psalter. All this is depressing and disheartening, and would do no good to any one. But there is many a work of art in which the effect is really due to just such a cause as this. The preparation for the climax is all in a low and minor key; but it is just the contrast of all this that invests the climax with its splendour. It breaks out like a sudden ball of light. So it is here with the triumphant vindication of the Righteousness of God. That is really what the psalm has been working up to all the time, even when baser feelings seemed to be in the ascendant. The crowning purpose of the psalmist is not revealed until the end; and when it is revealed it swallows up all besides. That flash of victorious conviction which impels the psalmist to say, "Verily there is a God that judgeth in the earth" is a touch that we may well be very reluctant to lose.'

'The other passage about which we seem to find ourselves in a harassing dilemma is the end of Psalm 137. It would be easy enough if we could simply stop at *v.* 6 as Convocation proposes. But is it possible to stop there? We cannot do so without mutilating the poem in a way that one would have thought that, for any one with a feeling for literary form, must be intolerable. The poem would be too short, and it would end too abruptly. We should be conscious all the time that something was missing. I cannot see in this any real solution of the difficulty. The only alternative seems to be to leave the poem as a whole or to omit it as a whole. But it is too beautiful and too moving for omission—the very classic expression of love and longing for the home of the soul in exile. Perhaps, after all, the least evil is to leave the poem as it stands. Dreadful as the last verse is to all our modern ideas, we may perhaps in this one case mentally supply quotation marks and remind ourselves that the language is that of the ancient poet and not our own. In a musical setting like that of the well-known anthem by Coleridge Taylor, or in ordinary chanting by a well-trained choir, the sinking of the voices may be taken as showing that the psalm as a whole, and this portion of it particularly, belongs to another age and to other conditions than our own.'

In Professor Hugh WALKER'S Warton Lecture on *The Revelation of England through her Poetry*, elsewhere noticed, there is a reference to this matter of vindictiveness.

English poetry, says Professor WALKER, reveals the English character in many aspects. He mentions two. 'It reveals that *kindliness* which is one of its most engaging traits, and which is shown conspicuously in love of and humanity to animals. There have been, of course, many exceptions. No reader of Elizabethan literature, and

no student of Hogarth, can deny that there has been much brutality; but a balanced judgment will, I think, come to the conclusion that humanity and not cruelty has been the prevailing spirit from the time when Chaucer's Prioress wept for the pain of her little dog. And unquestionably humanity has more and more prevailed over cruelty as time has passed, and above all in the last few generations. Shakespeare put on record a view of the sufferings of the beetle, which, whether correct or not, is certainly humane; Wordsworth embodied a philosophy of the rights of animals in *Hart-leap Well*; and Coleridge connected prayer with the love of the lower creation on the ground that the Maker of all loves all.'

But he proceeds at once to say that there is another side. 'Though kindliness is an admirable quality, its opposite, *sternness*, is indispensable in a virile race. The need for this conjunction of opposites has been admirably expressed by a living poet, and the perception of the need is attributed by him to a dead brother-poet:

> He saw 'tis meet that man possess
> The will to curse as well as bless,
> To pity—and be pitiless,
> To make, and mar;
> The fierceness that from tenderness
> Is never far.'

Now on the testimony of the poets sternness, fierceness, pitilessness is, in the last resort, English too. Perhaps we should be disposed to look for evidence that it is so first in those verses from the trenches which are as irreconcilable with the popular conception of the English spirit as is the great mass of our poetical literature itself. And it is in truth there; but it is far less prominent than might be expected; indeed, as Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch says in an introduction to a recent little book by a soldier, this poetry of the trenches is "curiously quiet and meditative." Still, an epitome of the whole English character is there—its humour, its easy tolerance, its kindliness to man and beast. Its sternness too, but, I repeat, in far less measure than the circumstances would lead us to anticipate. The slowness to anger of the common soldier, now, it would seem, tardily giving way to a deepening resentment, characterises the trench poets too. The illustrations of that sternness which is not only justifiable but, on occasion, indispensable, are to be found rather in the past. It will almost suffice to refer to Milton, in whom it is unmistakable. It is present in Shelley too, ethereal dreamer as he was. Above all it is present in Wordsworth. I repeat what I have said elsewhere: Wordsworth cancelled the line in which he called carnage God's daughter, but he never withdrew the thought.'

Is the War 'Re-creating our Supreme Divinity'?

By the Rev. C. W. Inglis Wardrop, M.A., Biggar.

There is a familiar verse in St. Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians (3^9) which may easily be taken in a quite inadequate sense, and the real significance of it missed. We are labourers together with God, he says. We may understand that first of all to mean that we have been given the privilege and honour of working along with God in His great works. And that is true, but that is not what St. Paul means, in the first instance, by the words; that is not what he emphasizes.

I.

The whole chapter is a glorifying of God as the great worker and builder. Whatever great thing is done in the world God does it. The supreme idea of the Apostle is that whatever is done in conversion—either of men or of the world—whatever mighty moral work is wrought, it is God who is the author of it, and God to whom the glory of it belongs. 'Wherefore let no man glory in men.'